

## American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection

Writing the West: Season 6, September 2024

### *Prairie Tech*

Use the prompts and paintings below to explore a couple ways prairie residents and immigrants navigated their environment, as well as other tech choices they made for purposes of survival, comfort, and entertainment.



**Peter Hurd, *Toward a New World*, 1942**



**Peter Hurd, *Wagon Train*, n.d.**

The myth of the Conestoga wagon as the quintessential mode of prairie transportation goes deep. Its image in paintings and movies (paired with horses instead of oxen) is ever pervasive. Hurd himself is a product of the Conestoga wagon myth, as well as a propagator of it. Choose either Hurd painting to respond to and write about what you believe Hurd wants you to feel as you experience his paintings.



**Albert Bierstadt, *Oregon Trail*, 1871**

The prairie schooner, so named for its sail-like, white, canvas cover moving like a ship through the prairie's "sea of grass," was full of supplies and gear. Everything from salted meat, barrels of water, barrels of nails, to a foot-pump organ, a big toolbox hanging off the back, and much more. Describe not only what's in the wagon but also the person who helped pack it. If you'd like, add a message on the wagon's cover. Be it: 'Pikes Peak or Bust,' 'For Oregon,' or something else. Their message is their goal as they travel through the prairie.



**Albert Bierstadt, *Indians Traveling near Fort Laramie*, 1861**

Another form of prairie traveling tech is the travois. Before horses, plains people used dogs as travois beasts of burden. Carrying 50-80lbs. (dogs) and 500-600lbs. (horses), the travois is ancient technology rediscovered through the American plains people. It's paired with the parfleche, waterproof hides full of supplies stacked one on top of the other for optimal travel. The long poles seen in the painting are the same poles used as teepees, a multi-functionality of one resource. There was no frontier for plains' tribes. At least, not in the American sense of the term. Their movement through the prairie comes with a different perspective than those traveling by schooner. Regardless of where they move, they're home. Describe this type of movement, where going from one place to another, even if separated by days of travel, feels like being home the entire time.